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What is it we touch?

Among the “five senses,” touch is an outlier in more than one respect. For some purposes, it comprises several different sensory systems, and it interacts almost inextricably with proprioception and kinaesthesia. After making some needed distinctions, this paper argues that what touch primarily represents is each of two or three properties internal to the skin. But tactual representation is unusually layered: by representing the skin properties, an internal tactual state further represents external objects and various of their properties, including hardness, surface texture, shape, heft, vibration, comparative temperature, and such features as being wet or dry, slippery, sticky or squishy. The paper closes with some remarks on tactual aspect-perception, “feeling-as,” and its lessons for aspect-perception generally.

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